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## **Affective disruption: Walter Benjamin and the ‘history’ of Ireland’s industrial schools**

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## **Abstract**

What role do organizations play in writing history? In this paper, I address the part played by organizations in the enactment of large-scale violence, and focus on the ways in which the resulting histories come to be written. Drawing on the case of Ireland's industrial schools, I demonstrate how such accounts can act to serve the interests of those in power, effectively silencing and marginalizing weaker people. A theoretical lens that draws on ideas from Walter Benjamin and Judith Butler is helpful in understanding this; the concept of 'affective disruption' enables an exploration of how peoples' experiences of organizational violence can be re-claimed from the past, and protected in a continuous remembrance. Overall, this paper contributes a new perspective on the writing of organizational histories, particularly in relation to the enactment of violence.

## **Keywords:**

Affect, Industrial Schools, Organizational History, Walter Benjamin, Organizational Violence

## **Introduction**

As a discipline, organization studies has, in the main, failed to address the role that organizations play in crises of humanity. While case studies of knowledge workers, office managers and professional creatives have proliferated in the past ten years, the discipline remains largely silent on the part played by organizations in facilitating large-scale, systematic suffering on the people associated with them (Fotaki, 2007). Despite possessing the theoretical tools, including Goffman's work on the total institution, and Bauman's on the organization of the Holocaust, organization scholars have largely ignored such topics (Clegg, 2006: 426). This is unfortunate given that some of the most horrific acts carried out by humans involve significant projects of organization. Despite some notable exceptions (Burrell, 1997; McKinlay and Wilson, 2012; Pina e Cunha et al., 2011), organization studies tends to remain silent on violence. The result of this is an inability to fully engage with the 'past' of

organizations in order to gain a deeper understanding of these entities today, and those to come. It appears that there is a need to understand this topic in new ways.

In this paper I propose that the notion of affective disruption is helpful here. To make this point, I first introduce ideas from Walter Benjamin, including his notion of disruptive montage. Next, I weave these ideas through a historical account of Ireland's industrial schools in a way that illustrates the power of dominant narratives, and suggests the potential for disruption. In making sense of this 'story', I show how the ideas of Benjamin, and Judith Butler, prove useful in understanding the ontological framing of the children residing in such schools, and specifically how this framing might be broken apart.

### **Benjamin's constellations**

In this paper I focus on a relatively narrow aspect of Walter Benjamin's work: his continual attempts to highlight the revolutionary potential within forgotten historical accounts (1999a, 1999b). The problem of history, he notes, is that particular narratives tend to dominate, often for the benefit of those in power. This happens at the expense of others who are unable to gain a voice, and often remain silenced as history continues in a repetition of stories written by those it has served well. Benjamin terms this continual rejection of other voices a catastrophe: an ongoing farce in which suppression is piled upon suppression, and entire worlds come to be lost forever (1999a).

Butler takes up this aspect of Benjamin's work while reflecting upon recent historical events, namely the ongoing U.S. engagement in the Middle East (Butler, 2009). She notes how the kind of dominant account described by Benjamin persists in this context, effectively excluding aspects of the past. Specifically, a status quo is in place within the United States, in relation to how prisoners of war are perceived. Inmates of Abu Ghraib prison and detainees at Guantanamo Bay are depicted as less than human by television and newspaper reports, and this perception is supported by misleading and selective accounts of Islamic history. The classification of detainees and prisoners as legitimate targets of punishment is legitimized by writing history in this way (Butler, 2009: 159).

A further example, relevant to the present paper, involves the case of Ireland's industrial schools. Here, the excessive physical, sexual and emotional abuse that persisted throughout the sixty-year history of these institutions are explained by those in power, as the result of systemic failures and a misappropriation of institutional rules. The question of why influential politicians and journalists, along with ordinary Irish people, continually ignored the suffering that was taking place, tends not to be asked. This dominant version of the industrial school narrative supports the general sense of closure that surrounds the story of Ireland's industrial schools today; this dark side of Irish society is relegated to the past.

Returning to Benjamin, he argues that one key reason for the proliferation of such dominant narratives, is that common understandings of history conceive of time as moving forward in a linear fashion, with humanity marching alongside in the name of 'progress'. In response to such problematic illusions, Benjamin adopts a materialist perspective. His aim is to enable the past to come to bear on the present and bring forth a critical gaze upon what is commonly accepted. In this weaving together of past and present, he argues, an image emerges that evokes the hidden, silenced voices of history and can act to disrupt the status quo. A critical lens is thrown upon taken-for-granted 'truths', and herein lies the revolutionary potential of historical accounts. Moments in which history is freed from the illusion of continuity between past and present, and from the dream that history represents a continual path of progress through time, are therefore crucial for the emergence of critique (Benjamin, 1999a). In his later work, he describes his method as aiming to 'blast a specific era out of the homogenous course of history' (2003: 396). The idea is that history, through such blasting, might be restructured in ways that preserve elements of the past that have been suppressed, enabling them to emerge in new forms.

For Benjamin, certain forms of presentation can achieve this. In works such as *The Author as Producer* (1934, in Benjamin, 1999b), he begins to discuss the political potential of art. Within the majority of artistic experiences, he notes, the viewer is merely encouraged to contemplate the aesthetics of the work, remaining distant from it. Such forms of artistic expression do nothing to question material inequalities. In contrast, other types of artistic presentation possess the potential to draw the viewer

into a questioning engagement. Benjamin gives the example of Brecht's style of theatre, arguing that what Brecht does is to compel the audience into reflecting upon the nature of the conditions in which they are living. He does this through ensuring that people experience an 'enduring' alienation when engaging with the work (1999b: 779). It is this feeling of alienation that engenders a sense of disruption with the status quo, in members of the audience. What is experienced is set against the material circumstances of the society of the time. This is achieved through Brecht's techniques of writing, specifically through the use of what Benjamin terms aesthetic montage, where a 'superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted' (1999b: 778).

### *Affect and disruption*

How might this interruptive force be understood? Drawing on Benjamin's ideas, Butler further develops the question of how reified accounts and rigid frames could possibly be blasted apart. Focusing on hegemonic representations of the 'Middle Eastern terrorist' within the U.S., she discusses a set of poems that were recently smuggled out of the Guantanamo Bay camps. These poems evoke the confusion, the fear and the longings felt by their authors, and in doing so they disrupt the official rhetoric surrounding Guantanamo Bay and its role of interring killers that can be seen as nothing other than inhumane. Evoking the subjectivity of the prisoners, these simple verses break apart existing ideological frames and offer us a glimpse of the human against which we wage war – the "specter that gnaws at the norms of recognition, an intensified figure vacillating as its inside and its outside" (Butler, 2009: 12). For the U.S. citizen, this spectral flash brings into sharp relief the valuable, valid life that is present here (Butler, 2009: 95). Evoking the idea of a flash suggests an immediacy, a sudden jolt akin to responses to Brecht's montage discussed earlier. Again, the effect is to disrupt. The point is that what might have been overlooked in the past as unimportant and forgotten, re-emerges as a present force, representing a kind of recognizability that relates to present experience.

For Butler, as for Benjamin, only certain circumstances allow for this kind of disruption. When such moments do occur, we see a breaking apart of the rigid ontological frames that come to be reified by dominant accounts, and this reveals to us the vulnerable, familiar human who is suffering. The key for Butler lies in her

concept of passionate attachment, a notion that she developed to understand the “fundamental sociality of embodied life” (Butler, 2004: 22). People inescapably experience attachments to others; “we are, from the start, already given over, beyond ourselves, implicated in lives that are not our own” (Butler, 2004: 22). The fact that we are embedded in others in this way, renders us exposed to a range of experiences of and by others, “a range that includes the eradication of our being at the one end, and the physical support for our lives, at the other” (Butler, 2004: 23). Importantly, this occurs through a technology of affect; moments of interruption such as those described above remind us of our interdependencies with other human beings, even those from the past. For Butler therefore, affect plays a key role in the kinds of disruptive flashes described in Benjamin’s proposed challenge to the reification of history. However, she notes, situations are often framed in ways that prevent flashes of affect from breaking through. Butler highlights ways in which our potential to feel for others is carefully controlled within certain media frames through, for example, photographs in which peoples’ faces are obliterated, the removal of names and other techniques. In this way, affect itself is regulated through the process of framing.

Overall, these ways of thinking about the meaning of history represent an utterly different way of engaging with the past. Benjamin’s ideas, and Butler’s development of these, enable a re-opening of forgotten aspects and a re-examination what has already been. For studies of organizational history, they show how we might possibly salvage the ‘trash’ of history, including aspects of organizations past that have been scorned, ignored or forgotten (de Cock et al., 2009: 19; 112). These ideas hold the potential for shedding light on contemporary histories of organizations, including the role that organizations play in enacting violence, along with the part that they play in writing the histories that result. In what follows, these ideas are explored in relation to the story of Ireland’s industrial schools.

### **Irish Industrial Schools: some histories**

Introducing this story, I highlight the ways in which people within organizations that had responsibility for these schools, addressed the abuses that were occurring in them. Sources include excerpts from witness testimony taken by the *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* during its recent investigation (Ryan, 2009), newspaper articles,

academic accounts and published book-length accounts from survivors. The latter are limited in number, not least because there existed in Ireland a general veto until the 1990s, on the publication of details of abuse in institutions run by religious orders (Touher, 2007).

Throughout the last century, Irish children identified as being in need were placed in industrial schools. There were 52 such schools in Ireland that held up to 6000 children at any one time. Typically, children came from low-income families with large numbers of children, from unmarried mothers, or were orphans (Ryan, 2009b). Others had a disability or mental illness, or had been victims of parental cruelty. A small minority had committed a crime, invariably prompted by conditions of poverty (Scanlan, 2006, p. 72). Children were typically admitted at the age of five or younger, and remained until adulthood. The idea was that they would receive basic education, religious instruction, and be trained in specific trades that would ensure employment in later life (Ryan, 2009b, p. 106). Industrial schools typically ran enterprises staffed by these children, including farms and workshops that earned incomes for the religious congregations operating the schools (Ryan, 2009b, p. 106; 202).

Severe beatings and physical abuse were common in these places (Ryan, 2009b, p. 126), as was sexual abuse (Ryan, 2009b: 170; 179; 180; 190, 234; Touher, 2007, p. 48), ritual humiliations (Ryan, 2009b, p. 121, 170), and constant reminders to children to remain silent about these occurrences (Touher 2007, p. 64). These abuses occurred throughout the sixty years of the schools' existence. The schools were staffed by clergy, but also by lay people, and were supported by an entire state system of police, lawyers, judges, doctors and politicians; Irish society in general was aware that this suffering was taking place. Even so, the abuse continued. In what follows, I briefly present the role of different organizations in this.

#### *The Department of Education*

Ireland's Department of Education was legally responsible for all children committed to Industrial Schools since 1908. The Minister granted the certification necessary to admit a child. The department set the rules and regulations by which the school would be run and defined standards for treatment, conditions, diet, teaching, visits by family members and visits home. Industrial school managers were under the



authority of the Department, and this was ostensibly upheld by a system of inspector visits. The Ryan investigation showed that few inspections took place, and those that did were limited. When inspectors visited, the occasion was staged and the children coached so that the event would pass off without incident (Ryan, 2009a, p. 19).

In relation to the child within these schools, it is evident that Departmental staff were quite aware that abuse of various kinds was occurring; complaints were filed that detailed appalling conditions and emaciated, dirty and miserable children (O'Sullivan, 2009, p. 294; Ryan, 2009b, p. 117; Scanlan, 2006, p. 72). In the 1940s for example, based on a series of damning case studies of conditions, Ireland's Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) openly and repeatedly criticized sending children to industrial schools (NSPCC, 1949). The Department ignored these arguments. Moreover, when the archbishop of Dublin assumed authority of the NSPCC in 1956, these damning case studies were replaced by 'quaint and superficial stories with happy endings' detailing a child's idyllic life within the industrial schools (Ferriter, 2009, p. 25).

Despite ample opportunities to intervene, and the resources to do so, the Department did nothing about the pupils in its care. Rather, the history of the Department is marked by wilful blindness to mistreatment of children in the Industrial School system. This is closely connected with the 'very significant deference' shown by this organization to the Catholic congregations (Ryan, 2009a, p. 16). Overall, we can see that the suffering of children who live in Industrial schools was not a source of concern.

### *The Irish Government*

Despite political rhetoric by successive Irish governments painting Ireland as a haven for children (Ferriter, 2009: 11; Scanlan, 2006: 70), it is clear that not *all* children were cherished within this society. In particular, impoverished children did not appear to be part of this idyllic Ireland. This attitude appears to pervade Irish politics, as successive representatives appeared to more or less ignore what was occurring in Industrial Schools. Despite the fact that politicians were aware of what was taking place (Morgan, 2009, p.227), records show that there were few discussions of industrial schools in the Dail (parliament) or Seanad (senate). Those that occurred were brief, involving vague and isolated observations (Morgan, 2009).

### *Irish society and media*

The industrial school system existed amid a network of organizations operating in Irish society, staffed by 'ordinary people'. Nurses and doctors from the local community attended children in the schools. Children were regularly hired out to local farmers to work in the fields, while members of the community came to schools to clean and cook. The lawyers involved in abuse cases, and the parents and families of victims were similarly involved in pupils' lives. Rather than being separated out from society, many people from different walks of life were aware of what was taking place within Ireland's industrial schools (Garrett, 2010; Morgan, 2009; Scanlan, 2006). Exploring the silence surrounding abuse at these schools, it must be noted that the Catholic Church, Ireland's 'moral authority', actively discouraged public debate on what it considered to be moral issues. Newspaper staff deferred to this, maintaining a media silence around known abuses (Morgan, 2009).

Overall, official Ireland, from government institutions to leading newspapers, appeared to 'know but not know' what was occurring in the Industrial Schools (Ferguson, 2007; Ferriter, 2009). Abuse of these children evoked neither horror nor outrage, and a silence surrounded isolated protests. A difference appears in relation to children of wealthier parents; in many such cases, calls for help were heeded and acted upon. While Ferguson (2007) discusses how Ireland's industrial school children represent the 'moral dirt' of Irish society, given their perceived connection with single mothers, crime and poverty, it appears that this group was also considered 'economic dirt'. Poor industrial school children, without social standing, represented the hidden and excluded underside of Irish society.

### *A new century: a new perspective?*

In the last ten years, the hidden secrets of these institutions have begun to be exposed as reports emerged detailing what took place. At the time of writing, an extensive investigation has been carried out; the *Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse* (Ryan, 2009) produced a 2600 page document reporting on an eight-year study. The *Ryan Report* is based on more than a thousand witness accounts. Its publication was considered a milestone in relation to Ireland's dark past, and the launch event was widely publicised across the globe.

The overall conclusion of the commission members authoring the *Ryan Report* is that, in the context of Ireland's industrial schools, the 'system failed the children' (Ryan, 2009a). In describing how this failure occurred, a list of key causes is provided which includes failures of 'systems and policy', 'management and administration', and 'senior personnel'. The authors recommend changes that will prevent future failures of this nature (Ryan, 2009a, p. 27), including tighter management controls and better reporting. The overall message is that adjustments to organizational systems and processes will ensure that the horrors experienced by so many children will never be repeated. In addition to these proposed systemic changes, compensation to sufferers has been paid in many cases, with some legal challenges remain ongoing. Finally, a memorial costing half a million euro has been proposed for central Dublin, upon which the official government apology that had been issued in 1999 will be inscribed. Overall, a sense of closure pervades dominant accounts of Ireland's Industrial School experience.

What of the group of children in Ireland today, who would have been candidates for Industrial Schools if they had been alive forty years ago: those in danger of poverty, or without support from family or carers? It appears that these vulnerable people continue to be ignored and to suffer while in the care of the Irish system. A total of 196 children died while they were ostensibly being cared for by the state between 2000 and 2010 (Shannon and Gibbons, 2012). Of these deaths, almost two thirds were due to non-natural causes including suicide and drugs. Moreover, the report found that files on many children were in complete disarray; in fact state authorities were unable to state exactly how many children were in care, prior to the commissioning of the 2012 report (O'Brien and Taylor, 2012). In general, Irish society continues to show scant concern for its vulnerable impoverished children (Garrett, 2010); little appears to have changed in relation to how they are perceived and how they are treated.

This narrative evokes Benjamin's observation of the enduring nature of suppression. When particular accounts of history are allowed to dominate at the expense of those voices that have always been devalued, silence comes to be piled upon silence and this results in catastrophe. The case is closed and the status quo is maintained, as appears in the case of Ireland's Industrial schools. Here, the narrative that has

emerged does not come close to asking why, for sixty years, certain Irish people were ritually ignored by those tasked with their care, and why their suffering was silently enabled. It is clear that a new way of understanding this situation is required.

Remaining with Benjamin, in what follows I present fragments of these histories alongside 'official' statements of closure. Travelling back and forth through the sixty year period during which Industrial Schools operated, and oscillating between a variety of different voices, I loosely follow Benjamin's idea of disruptive montage. Departing from the norms of a qualitative academic paper, I present excerpts but do not follow these with exhaustive analyses and explanation of each one. Rather than say what they represent, my aim is to simply show. The effect is not elegant, but somewhat disjointed. Even so, I ask the reader to bear with me. I have highlighted dates and sources in each case.

### **Introducing disruptive montage**

History is written in a linear fashion; events follow on from events and narratives are typically crafted by those who have prevailed, who have not suffered and who possess the means to speak and be heard. Benjamin questions this, asking how things might otherwise be. In this vein, I present an alternative set of understandings of Ireland's industrial school past.

It is the **1940s**:

I was born left-handed, and I learned to write at school left-handed and I was told that the devil was in me that's why I was left-handed and they decided to stop me. They would come from behind, I wouldn't know and they would come down with the side of a ruler or a cane on my hand to stop me using my left hand. They beat the devil out of me, that was the saying. I had to use my right hand to write. To this day I couldn't cut a piece of bread with my right hand, I still do it with my left hand. I butter my bread with my left hand I can't do it with my right hand. But I write with my right hand.

(**Former pupil** describes writing with his left hand. Ryan, 2009b, p.149).

It is **1942**:

You have the situation that the child probably had been proved before a police court to be a notorious liar... Nevertheless some great abuse may have crept in and you are in this dilemma, that it is impossible to satisfy your mind that the allegations made by the children have absolutely no foundation.

(Statement by **Minister for Education**, DD, 1942)

It is **early 1950s**:

He told me to kneel down on the floor and he stood over me with his arms folded. He was quite cool and calm and he said 'I have told you now more than once to come out and I am going to give you the hiding of your life' real calm. He was enjoying it. He said 'hold your hand out. Hold your left hand out and don't drop it until I tell you'.

(**Former pupil** describes missing a sports training session. Ryan, 2009b, p. 120)

It is the **1960s**:

We saw educational issues as involving middle class concerns like curriculum development or Church and State, not 'the lesser breeds without the Law' in the Industrial Schools

(**Education correspondent**, major daily newspaper, in Morgan, 2009, p. 232).

It is the **1950s**:

Often after seeing a film, I'd fantasise about being a star, so desperate was I to be good at something. I longed to be a famous poet or writer, and I wrote silly verse and songs- but when (friends) Jamjar, Oxo and the gang saw them, they got great fun out of them and out of me!

(**Former pupil**, Touher 2007: 89)

It is **2009**:

*Recommendations of the Commission arising from the findings of its investigations: 2. To alleviate or otherwise address the effects of the abuse on those who suffered, a memorial should be erected.*

The following words of the special statement made by the Taoiseach in May 1999 should be inscribed on a memorial to victims of abuse in institutions as a

permanent public acknowledgement of their experiences. It is important for the alleviation of the effects of childhood abuse that the State's formal recognition of the abuse that occurred and the suffering of the victims should be preserved in a permanent place:

On behalf of the State and of all citizens of the State, the Government wishes to make a sincere and long overdue apology to the victims of childhood abuse for our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue.

**It is early 1950s:**

He took this leather strap out and he gave me four or five straps. I couldn't hold it out any longer because the strap was starting to go up my arm. I had welts on it. I dropped it...

He went berserk. When you seen this man when he lost his temper he was like a wolf. His jaws literally went out and he bared his teeth and he just lashed at me. I was running trying to get away from him. He hit me, it didn't matter where, legs, back, head, anywhere. During that I must have passed out...

The injuries, you just put up with them. I was black and blue but I just had to put up with them ... I never missed a session after that, I can assure you.

**(Former pupil describes missing a sports training session, 2009b, p. 120)**

**It is 2009:**

*Recommendations of the Commission arising from the findings of its investigations: 3. The lessons of the past should be learned.*

For the State, it is important to admit that abuse of children occurred because of failures of systems and policy, of management and administration, as well as of senior personnel who were concerned with Industrial and Reformatory Schools.

An important aspect of this process of exploration, acceptance and understanding by the State and the Congregations is the acknowledgement of the fact that the system failed the children, not just that children were abused because occasional individual lapses occurred.

**It is the 1950s:**

The Driller earned that Killer nickname he had; he was an outright child-basher. He was a bloody terror. I got done by him a few times and I can tell you he put the full force of his strength behind the cane or leather, whichever he wished to beat you with. He mostly hit the lads across the face and head with his clenched fist or open hands... The Driller would show who was tough. The only problem was he carried it all to the brink, so he did, like taking a boy's trousers down during drill exercises and putting the lad across the wall to beat the bottom off him in full view of everyone... He was savage.

As a drill instructor however, he was excellent. Even the bad guys could be good, and my fondest memories of those times are of the Easter parades. It was an incredible and moving experience to be part of a boy's army on parade, with Driller the Killer in command... the Driller was at his supreme best, and I felt very proud to be an Artaner (**Former pupil**, Touher 2007: 58).

**It is 1966:**

*(A) breach in the iron curtain was the work of Michael Viney. He wrote a series of articles in The Irish Times, based on six weeks' research. Significantly, even this major series attracted only one (published) letter to the editor, and it seems likely that given the expenditure of resources, the paper would have published any reasonable letters received.*

*Likewise, the series was met by an eerie silence from other Irish newspapers, which declined the opportunity to mine the rich lode, which, it might seem, had been opened up by Mr Viney. (Morgan, 2009; 231).*

**It is 2009:**

*Recommendations of the Commission arising from the findings of its investigations. To prevent where possible and reduce the incidence of abuse of children in institutions and to protect children from such abuse, 10. It is important that rules and regulations be enforced, breaches be reported and sanctions applied.*

The failures that occurred in all the schools cannot be explained by the absence of rules or any difficulty in interpreting what they meant. The problem lay in

the implementation of the regulatory framework.

*11. A culture of respecting and implementing rules and regulations and of observing codes of conduct should be developed.*

It is the **1950s**:

Touher describes how, four years after joining the school, he had once again been visited by a Brother in the night. The following morning, tired and frightened, he found himself last in the queue for the washbasins, a status that was normally accompanied by a beating. Completely disheartened, Touher stood by the wall with his hands above his head, the normal stance for those who were awaiting punishment, 'I simply wanted to scream, 'let me out of this evil place!'. He could hear that in the next room, a Brother had ordered all children to sing the hymn Hail, Queen of Heaven, as the previous night's bedwetters were marched to the laundry. Despite his utter dejection, he writes, 'and yet, as the huge dormitory was filled with the sound of almost two hundred boys singing, I was moved to tears. Without realizing it, I had a love-hate relationship with Artane'

(Former pupil, Touher 2007: 155).

It is **1921**:

People reared in workhouses, as you are aware, are no great acquisition to the community and they have no ideas whatever of civic responsibilities. As a rule their highest aim is to live at the expense of the ratepayers. Consequently, it would be a decided gain if they all took it into their heads to emigrate.

(WT Cosgrave, future **President of the Executive Council of the Irish Free State**, private letter. NAI, **1921**).

It is the **1950s**:

Life after Artane was very hard for me for a number of years. I found the adjustment to the real world an enormous strain. In the early days the fact that I was working among many of my old pals certainly helped, although the boys' hostel was no home from home, as it were- there was far too much violence and sexual abuse there too...

I still suffered dreadful nightmares, sleep-walking, and talking in my sleep. I felt at odds with people. I easily upset people, and this happened particularly in my work place. This went on for years and years, like a shadow of my past.



(Former pupil, Touher, 2007: 248).

**It is the 1960s:**

We knew about the sexual abuse in the Schools because one of the Gardai who drove the children from the Court to the Schools told us about it. In today's climate I'd have protested to the Department of Justice. But in those times, at best my protest would have been ignored, at worst I'd have been disciplined. (Testimony of a **District Court Clerk** who served in 1960s, in Morgan, 2009: 235)

**It is 2009:**

*Recommendations of the Commission arising from the findings of its investigations. 4. To alleviate or otherwise address the effects of the abuse on those who suffered, Counselling and educational services should be available.*

Counselling and mental health services have a significant role in alleviating the effects of childhood abuse and its legacy on following generations.

*An oppressive stigma in Irish society surrounding Industrial school children made life difficult, long into adulthood. They were deemed somewhat 'contaminated', marked by their shabby clothes (Ryan, 2009a, p. 24), and associated with 'fallen' single mothers, crime and crippling poverty (Ferguson, 2007).*

**It is the 1950s:**

I was full of memories now. Odd, really, to think that a place so full of regimented ways, with its brutal system and hard, tough discipline, would mean so much to me. I felt that I was part of the institution and that in going I was losing part of myself'

(Former pupil on leaving Artane Industrial School, Touher 2007: 240).

**It is 1954:**

'This is an isolated incident...[and] any guarantee I give parents of full protection of their children is no licence to any of the children to do what they like'.

(Minister Sean Moylan, on a case arising in Parliament in which a 14-year-

old boy had his arm broken by a Brother at Artane Industrial School, using a sweeping brush. In Morgan, 2009, p. 227).

## **Discussion**

As we saw above, the *Ryan Report*'s recommendations, the memorial and the apology evoke a sense of closure. This sense is echoed by other commentators; even vehement critics of Industrial School abuse have noted that the recent inquiry marks the end of a sad era, the close of a 'long and unhappy episode' (Scanlan, 2006, p. 72). This 'rush to closure' reflects Benjamin's ideas on the compelling nature of progress; it is tempting to put in place 'quick fix' measures so that a problem as complex as the position of vulnerable children in Irish society can be seen to have been solved. Most importantly, it affords people a sense of moving on.

As Benjamin warns however, this illusion is dangerous as it can hide the ways in which we live in co-presence with aspects of our past. This spectral haunting of present by past is clear in recent comments from Irish public figures. Michael Viney, the journalist who covered the Industrial Schools in 1966 describes the guilt that haunted him even thirty years later for not pursuing this issue, despite his knowing about the physical abuse that was occurring, and suspecting sexual abuse (Boland, 2010). Similarly, an editor of a national paper describes the 'heavy burden' that remains with him today as a result of knowing about the horrors of the Industrial Schools, and not reporting them (Morgan, 2009, p. 230). This editor describes how, in the 1950s, a CBS school manager burst into his office demanding that the scheduled story describing a sexual abuse-related court case be dropped, and so it was. Finally, shortly after the publication of the Commission report, the editor of the Irish Times noted that it mapped out the 'dark hinterland of the State, a parallel country whose existence we have long known but never fully acknowledged' (Editorial, 2009). That this 'parallel country' remains is seen in today's Ireland, where impoverished, disadvantaged children continue to occupy the abject place, forming the 'outside' of Irish society. What these observations imply is that the past continues to re-emerge as an integral part of Irish present.

As we see above, the dominant histories ignore this co-presence, but rather promote an illusion of closure. This illusion masks the fact that children were perceived by

organizations involved in these Schools in certain dehumanizing ways, and that this contributed to the abuse that took place. Since reports of abuse in Ireland's industrial schools began to emerge in the 1990s, responses from public figures have tended to avoid adopting any form of collective responsibility. For example, the widely heralded apology by the Taoiseach (prime minister) issued on behalf of all the citizens of Ireland in 1999, expressed regret for 'our collective failure to intervene, to detect their pain, to come to their rescue'. The idea is that the problem was always 'out there', detached from normal Irish society, and that now it is over. For Department of Education staff, right up to successive government Ministers, there were no children deserving of protection, rather there were thousands of entities that were likely to be criminals, or liars, and that ultimately posed an awkward problem for the state. Real human suffering was occurring within the walls of these institutions and surely this alone would have been enough to engender horror in the ordinary people that knew about it, and compel them to try and prevent it. It was not. It therefore appears that the lives that were sent to industrial schools were not considered to be 'children', where a child represents a human being that is worthy of protection: that must be cherished. These lives represented something different. Reflecting on the ontological status of the children in question, it seems that they were seen as somewhat less than human.

Moving from past representations to representations of children today, as noted above little is changed in terms of how poor, vulnerable children are ontologically perceived within the Irish system. This group remains undeserving of attention and assistance. This suggests that the recent recommendations are flawed because they overlook the way in which certain types of children are seen as somewhat unworthy of care and protection, instead proposing to adjust organizational systems and structures. This response is inadequate; as Bauman (1989) and Agamben (1999, p. 158) point out, emphasising changes to structures can be insufficient where large-scale human suffering is involved; a deeper analysis is often needed. The danger of not doing this is clear in other situations in which 'adjustments to the system' have failed, as illustrated in Laurant's (2003) chilling picture of the closure of large psychiatric institutions in the UK. Here, the continuing societal marginalization of patients was overlooked, with disastrous consequences when people returned to community life outside of these institutions (see also Chenoweth, 1996). The Ryan report's

recommendations and the illusion of closure that they promote do not, in other words, address the underlying catastrophe that results in the ongoing exclusion and marginalization of Ireland's impoverished children, who continue to represent the moral and economic dirt of Irish society.

To move on from this, I presented another way of experiencing this aspect of Ireland's past. The aim was to explore whether an aesthetic montage provides the potential of enabling a re-engagement with voices that otherwise remain silenced: the children residing behind the walls of Ireland's industrial schools. In his work on the Paris Arcades, Benjamin discusses how at certain moments, aspects of the past can emerge in a sudden, unexpected way and interrupt our understandings of the present. What emerges is something of a shock as different accounts are enabled to sit side by side. In such moments, an image emerges in which what has been in the past, fuses together in a 'flash' with what exists in the present (1999a). For Benjamin, it is important to understand that it is not a case of the past casting light on the present, or vice versa. Rather, an experience arises that contains both past and present, what Benjamin refers to as a constellation. The effect is to disrupt; the method of montage encompasses a critique of history (1999a). What has been overlooked in the past as unimportant and forgotten re-emerges as a present force, representing a kind of recognizability that relates to present experience.

The above montage enables something of a new perspective on these unimportant remnants of Irish society that were ignored at the time, and that history has since forgotten. The lost voices of inmates appear in a spectral, haunting form to gnaw at the borders of the official explanations that are offered. In this way, we see how Benjamin's ideas help us to disrupt dominant accounts of history. In particular, it highlights the value of Butler's development of Benjamin's ideas. She notes that an attention to affective forces is vital in order to understand the nature of the disruptive flashes needed to challenge hegemonic reifications of history. In the case presented here, we see for example the paradoxical, complex nature of human existence, a raw sense of how it was to be within these schools. The few accounts that have emerged detailing life in Ireland's industrial schools paint a rich the rich picture of friendships, challenges, struggles and, inevitably beatings and sometimes sexual abuse. These

evoke the sense that there is a human present; the stories provide us with glimmers of the speaking subjects.

In summary therefore, in answer to the question of how the role of organizations in historical events might be thought of anew, it appears that Benjamin's ideas on how temporality might be problematized, and the co-existence of past and present within a given moment are useful. Butler contributes to these ideas of the 'dialectic flash' by arguing that an affective jolt can shoot through such moments; affect provides a way in which the disruptive montage can occur. In relation to organizational history, and the problem of understanding the past in such ways, this paper provides an example of how official accounts and rarely-heard voices can be placed side-by-side in a manner that throws the present, taken-for-granted, into question. It proposes a potential new way of presenting data involving attempts at affective disruption; the superimposition of the formal upon the informal, the official upon the weak, and past upon present.

## **Conclusion**

For many commentators, Industrial Schools emerged at a unique economic, social, and cultural juncture that supported and enabled them, but that is now past. The idea is that Irish society has moved on and would no longer tolerate such incidents. It appears from this study that such approaches are missing a vital step; before reasons are listed, and before recommendations are made, the idea that there were in fact 'children' attending the Industrial Schools, in the eyes of the people responsible for their care, must be questioned. Viewing industrial schools and the organizations that supported them, through the lens provided here, poses challenges. It renders attempts at closure, at 'moving on', somewhat problematic. It leads us to question how we might be more open to a shifting temporality in which past and present are not forced apart. It suggests the importance of continuing to remember. In the absence of such understanding, history appears likely to repeat itself.

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